Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

September 1-15, 1997 *Ken Silverstein & Alexander Cockburn* **VOL. 4, NO. 15**

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How the Drug Lords Test Their Products

"Hold still. Relax your arm!" a nurse implores, preparing to draw blood from a twitchy patient. "Look away, it'll be easier", suggests an onlooker who has already undergone the procedure. We're in Princeton University Medical Center's Clinical Pharmacology Unit, which is "sponsored by Bristol-Myers Squibb and conducts clinical investigations on new drugs discovered by Bristol-Myers Squibb scientists", according to a Pharmacology Unit pamphlet. The occasion is a screening of volunteers for a four-day, five-night study of an experimental medicine for stroke. Those accepted into the test will get $600 for their pains.

The squeamish patient, a **CounterPunch** man, sacrifices his blood to investigate the relationship between the pharmaceuticals industry and some 40,000 human guinea pigs who flock to testing labs every year. Are the "volunteers" freely choosing to assist the white-coats in expanding the frontiers of scientific understanding? Or does poverty press people into service on behalf of the drug companies?

Unsurprisingly, in the case of most of those interviewed by **CounterPunch**, the latter proved to be the more compelling motive. As one self-described "lab rat" told our spy, "It's not about science. It's all about money."

The nation's big drug companies have never been known for high-minded ethical standards. Before 1900, orphans and street urchins were used as controls in drug experiments. Testing remained informal in the early part of the twentieth century, as companies issued experimental drugs to doctors to try out on sick patients. After the thalidomide scare of 1962, Congress passed laws to standardize drug testing procedures. Animal tests were required for all new drugs, followed by experiments on healthy human subjects (the first round of testing on humans is called Phase I). Most drugs were tested on prisoners, who often were coerced into taking part and kept in the dark about the dangers of the experiments.

Ever since the mid-1970 s, when the FDA issued stricter informed consent rules, high compensation has been necessary to attract research subjects for pharmaceuticals tests. The tests are conducted by contract research organizations or university hospitals, or directly by drug companies.

Few people with comfortable financial circumstances volunteer to be guinea pigs for the drug companies. Last fall, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article revealing that an Indianapolis clinic run by Eli Lilly, maker of Prozac, mostly uses homeless persons to test drugs for FDA approval. The Lilly program, which pays an $85 per day stipend, is famous "through soup kitchens, prisons and shelters from coast to coast." A nurse at Lilly's clinic in Indianapolis told the *Journal* that the majority of participants in the phase 1 testing programs are alcoholics. Heavy drinkers and drug users are supposed to be excluded from experimental programs because the presence in the body of alcohol or drugs compromises test results.

Participation in drug and medical studies is a serious gamble. No one

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Our Little Secret

Fayed's Secret Cameras

Among the less alluring features of the London mansion of Mohammed Fayed, father of the departed paramour of Princess Diana, were cameras concealed in all the bathrooms. Dodi's father (perhaps even Dodi) was apparently in the habit of later reviewing pictures of people—not doubt including Di—in these bathrooms. This makes Mohammed's thunderings and proposed legal actions against the paparazzi more than usually hypocritical.

Mohammed Fayed (the pretentious "al-Fayed" has no genealogical validity) has always been a thoroughly nasty piece of work, from the moment of his arrival in Haiti in 1964, claiming to be an Arab sheikh and assiduous in pursuit of Papa Doc Duvalier's favorite daughter. According to a 753-page report compiled by the British Department of Trade and Industry in 1988 and published in 1990, Fayed acquired several valuable concessions in Haiti before departing at some speed. The DTI report charged him with "substantial deceit", stealing over $250,000 that the wretched country "could ill afford to lose".

It will be interesting to see if Fayed pursues his libel action against *Vanity Fair*, which published an unflattering article about him in September of 1995. It accused Fayed of harassing his secretaries, of being a charity humbug and a racist.

The case was originally scheduled to be heard in October. Shortly before the terminal event in the tunnel beside the Pont d'Alma, it was put off after *Vanity Fair* lodged hundreds of supporting documents about the man whose corruption of prominent Conservatives with those fat wads of cash in brown envelops assisted in the victory of Labor.

Princess Di's Comforts

To deflect the anger of someone who called up on Sunday morning to shower abuse on journalists a *CounterPunch* editor joked that maybe the real blame should be laid to the British Secret Service and the landmine manufacturers, whom Di had been denouncing in recent months. Those photos of Dodi and Di kissing had probably sealed her fate, with right-wing elements in SIS determined that the Royal Family should not be further tainted by even remote association with an Egyptian playboy. To our astonishment the telephone caller took this suggestion with extreme seriousness, showing that everyone prefers a crime to an accident.

In the end Diana only truly seemed to come into her own when in the company of people in worse shape than herself. At the sight of a person with AIDS, or a maimed child, she would glow, as though the proximity of imminent death and suffering lent a steadying hand, a comfort to her fraught existence. No wonder she took such an interest in minefields.

As she bent down to embrace a little boy, oblong handbag elegantly raised to shield her cleavage from the photographers, it was obvious that she did not mind the paparazzi, in fact craved their constant attention, but on terms she hoped to be hers. That's how everyone in show business wants it. Probably Dodi snapped "Lose them" to the chauffeur, who obediently ran the car up to that fatal 90 miles per hour. Di knew, far better than Dodi, that paparazzi were inescapably part of the terms of her trade and gave her comfort and meaning, as surely as did her encounters with the dying and the maimed.

Life On the Fast Track

President Clinton used his August radio address to press the case for "fast track", a legislative device that greatly heightens the president's ability to negotiate foreign trade agreements. "Our workers and our businesses are the best in the world, but they can't compete in the slow lane", the president told the nation. Clinton is expected to make fast-track — which would allow him to submit trade deals to Congress for a straight up-or-down vote, with no possibility for lawmakers to offer amendments — his top priority this fall.

Business, which sees free trade deals such as NAFTA principally as a bridge to cheap labor abroad, is throwing itself into the battle. We have a letter that The Business Roundtable sent to hundreds of corporate chieftains seeking "immediate financial assistance" for a multi-pronged fast-track lobbying campaign. "We believe we need to raise a minimum of $3 million in order to insure that the voice of the business community is heard," says the letter, which is signed by the CEOs of Boeing, Caterpillar Inc., Chrysler, TRW Inc., General Motors and Procter & Gamble. Each of those companies has already agreed to donate $100,000 to the cause. A fax-back form sent along with the letter asks corporate colleagues to match that figure, or to send in "some other appropriate sum".

The Roundtable is worried because the public, having seen that NAFTA brought few of the benefits promised by its supporters while costing thousands of jobs at home, is overwhelmingly op-

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Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions,
$25 student/low-income
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posed to "fast-track" (by a margin of 62-31 percent, according to a NBC poll in July). Without fast-track "there can be no expansion of NAFTA to include Chile or other Central and South American countries", the letter says, clearly alarmed that business might one day be prevented from firing U.S. employees in order to hire more attractively priced Hondurans. "There can be no Free Trade Agreement of the Americas".

To "secure support" for fast-track, the Roundtable plans to target the press aggressively, with "mailings to news media .... editorial board visits, and production and placement of op-eds in key states." The $3 million kitty also will be used to pay for a "grassroots campaign", including "aggressive use of 1-800 number to generate Congressional communications from company employees, suppliers and constituents" and "distribution of fast-track lobbying kits to companies for use in Congressional visits". All of this will be backed by a "Washington campaign relying on use of corporate offices of Roundtable companies and CEO communications with legislators".

TRIUMPH AT TOOELE

Steven Jones, the former safety officer at the Army's chemical weapons incinerator in Tooele, Utah we interviewed at length in a recent issue of **CounterPunch**, won a tremendous victory on August 1 when federal labor Judge Ellen O'Shea ruled that Jones had been illegally removed from his job. In a fiercely worded 141-page finding, O'Shea ruled that Jones had been fired simply because he was trying to enforce environmental laws at the plant. She said testimony by officials from EG&G was "not credible or reliable" and that the reasons the company gave for dismissing Jones were "based on lie". O'Shea also singled out the Army for criticism, noting that the Tooele facility is "uniquely and solely controlled by and subject to [the] military".

The judge ordered EG&G to rehire Jones and pay him his full back salary since the date of his termination (roughly $250,000), and another $200,000 in economic and punitive damages. If EG&G decides not to reinstate Jones, the company must pay him another $500,000. Jones tells us he feels vindicated by the verdict and is ready to go back to work. The first thing he plans to do is to insist on an independent audit of the plant's operations. "They need some honesty and integrity out there," Jones said.

HOLD A MIRROR UP TO NATURE

The UPS rear view mirror scandal has attracted far too little public attention. During the strike we made mention, in another venue, of UPS's adamant refusal to install convex mirrors at the rear of its delivery vans, which would cost the company almost nothing and most certainly save lives. We got the following letter from Dee Norton, who lives in northeastern Seattle:

Sen. Chris Dodd, the whore of Wall Street, has spent the last year hiding from reporters, but he seizes the phone to chat with strangers wanting to rent his Irish cottage.

"This is a short note expressing my family's sincere thanks and appreciation for inclusion of 'those convex mirrors' in a column about UPS. We called them rear crossview mirrors in our petition to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and in the C.J.'s Bill introduced into the Washington legislature this year.

"C.J. Norton, 3, our only grandchild was killed May 18, 1994, by a blindly backed delivery truck in the parking lot of an apartment complex in Lynnwood north of Seattle. Since then we have been working to reduce the chances of similar tragedies. Only a federal regulation can require them on new trucks and only regulations in each state can do so for the thousands of trucks already in service.

"The mirrors, developed and adopted by FedEx more than 12 years ago, cost only about $50. FedEx found a 33 per cent reduction in backing accidents after a one year test in four hub cities.

"UPS is fighting us. Doug Baker, its Northwest vice-president, testified against C.J.'s bill during a legislative hearing and said training will solve the problem. They have already been training for at least nine years. Yet we know of three children killed by their backing trucks since C.J. died under a Diaper Delivery Service truck.

"Mike and Dawn Henderson of Ruby, New York, are working for a law in their state after losing Joey, 5, to a UPS truck that backed into their driveway to turn around. I will send them a copy of your column because it will buoy them the same way it affected our family. The other two families are unable to join our effort because of the lingering effect of the trauma.

"But I have to pass on one additional point. UPS fired Gary Stoltz, driver of a delivery truck which backed over Rebecca Lasc, 18-months, in Kent, Washington, a few months after C.J. was killed. A judge who dismissed reckless backing charges against Stoltz said on the record that the company should consider installing crossview mirrors. Teamsters Local 174 fought and succeeded in regaining Stoltz's job. We believe there are many other victims of blindly backed delivery trucks and are working to identify and locate their families."

DODD THE RENTIER

A **CounterPunch** reader tells us she answered an ad in the *New York Review of Books* for a house in Galway: "handsomely restored, seven room, gabled cottage, 3 fireplaces, on 14 acres overlooking bay/ocean, sunlit studio, spectacular panoramic views, private, near Brigadoon fishing village, fully equipped"—for $1,860 a month, preferably long term.

Our reader called the number, and after fruitless talks with underlings, duly received a call from none other than Connecticut's shame, the whore of Wall Street, Senator Chris Dodd. He informed her that unfortunately his brother was taking it in October for a honeymoon but would be glad to rent at other times.

If you tried as a reporter to speak to Dodd on the people's business, you wouldn't get near unless you were bigtime. But when personal pelf is at stake, he'll seize the phone. ■

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The Budget Deal:

Line Items Bill Didn't Veto

Tucked into the nether regions of the tax cut deal celebrated with bi-partisan fervor on Capital Hill is a list of 80 so-called limited tax benefits". These target billions in tax breaks for select corporations and politically well-connected individuals. Back in the embers of the budget deal, the press suggested that these tax breaks emerged at the stroke of midnight before the vote from the offices of Newt Gingrich. Not so. The tax provisions were the fruit of months of feverish lobbying by some of the Hill's most potent influence-peddlers. Moreover, many of the loopholes were suggested and supported by the White House, as Clinton confirmed when, with many a virtuous flourish, he chose to excise only three of the more blatantly grotesque provisions with his first proud use of the line item veto.

At the request of General Motors, the new line of "clean fuel" cars will be exempted from the 8 per cent luxury tax. This provision was endorsed by Al Gore and shoved through the House by Rep. David Camp, a Republican from Michigan. Gore, in his capacity as czar of the Internet, also bowed to a plea from computer hardware manufacturers to double the allowable deduction for donating outdated computer equipment to schools—a billion dollar subsidy for a gift of passé technology that few teachers know how to use and no one knows how to fix. According to a Senate aide, the language of this exemption was suggested by Hewlett-Packard's lobbyist Catherine Porter, former counsel to the Ways and Means Committee and, from 1983 to 1988, an adviser on tax matters to Senator John Chaffee.

Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan and James Jeffords joined forces to secure a steep reduction in the excise tax on hard cider from $1.07 per gallon to 22.6 cents per gallon, less than half the amount charged for beer. Most of the nation's hard cider is produced by applegrowers in upstate New York and Vermont.

The Petroleum Retail Marketers Association engineered a huge windfall when Senators Don Nickles and John Breaux inserted language allowing service stations to avoid paying gasoline taxes on fuel sold to the federal government, the single largest purchaser of gas in the country. The Petroleum Retailers were represented by lobbyist Charles Brain, the former staff director of the House Ways and Means Committee. This multi-billion dollar gift primarily benefits integrated oil companies, such as Shell, Exxon and Chevron.

The rich can now get even larger tax deductions by transfering stock (instead of cash) to private foundations. Senator Chaffee, working with the Nature Conservancy, concocted an exemption from estate taxes for undeveloped land set aside for "conservation purposes"—that is, land bequested to nonprofits like the Nature Conservancy. Oil industry executives were given a huge tax break on income earned while working overseas. Natural gas and methanol producers received more than $100 million in new tax breaks. FBI and DEA agents can now write off more of their travel expenses when their work takes them to such remote places as Ruby Ridge and Waco.

FBI and DEA agents can now take bigger expense deductions for their trips to remote places such as Ruby Ridge and Waco.

Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer and Senator Phil Gramm secured more than $50 million in new tax breaks for one of their more prominent political contributors: Sammons Enterprises, a privately held real estate firm in Ft. Worth, which kicked in more than $50,000 to the RNC. Archer and Gramm tried their best to garner a $75 million tax loophole for Harold Simmons, the Dallas sugar beet baron, who had contributed $500,000 to the Republicans. But in a partisan swipe Clinton vetoed the provision.

Another $500 million loophole was carved out for the overseas operations of American insurance companies. This deal was negotiated by insurance industry lobbyist Anthony Valanzano, who served as chief counsel for the Republicans on the House Banking Committee. Amway scored a major victory when Rep. Dick Armey and Senator Spencer Abraham of Michigan inserted a provision in the tax bill giving the company a $280 million break for its two Asian affiliates. Amway, which sluiced $366,000 to the Republican Party in the last election cycle, retained the services of Roger Mentz, a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under Bush, to plead its cause.

Prowling the halls of Congress for the cigarette makers were three heavy hitters: George Mitchell, Haley Barbour and Anne Richards. Their work swiftly paid off as the planned tax was reduced from 40 cents a pack to 10 cents a pack and, more importantly, the expected $15 billion in revenues from the tax would be credited against the proposed tobacco settlement.

Some of the language in the bill is exquisitely opaque. Take the following provision: "Simplify foreign tax credit limitation for dividends from 1,050 companies to provide look-throughs starting in 2003." Interpretation: a billion dollar deduction for companies that do more business in places such as Indonesia and Haiti.

Back in the 1980s, companies such as GE and Playtex not only got away with paying no federal income taxes, they actually demanded and received rebates from the US Treasury. The situation got so extreme that even Reagan pushed for a revision to the tax code, resulting in the Alternative Minimum Tax. Thanks to delicate lobbying by the National Association of Manufacturers, the new tax bill succeeded in having that eliminated, another $20 billion gift to a select list of corporations.

The biggest victory of all will probably turn out to be that won by Microsoft, which stands to reap at least $1.7 billion in new tax credits for the sale of licenses to manufacture its software programs overseas. Microsoft's cause was advanced by Bruce Heiman, a former legislative director for Senator Mohynihan, and Leslie Dach, the Democratic Party fixer who now runs the Edelman PR firm. Microsoft executives acted nonchalant about their triumph. "Look, we don't consider this a special tax break," said Microsoft's Mark Murray. "This is something we've deserved for a long time." ■

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(**DRUGS** *continued from page 1)*
knows the long-term side effects of the drugs that the volunteers take. In the short term, even routine medical procedures entail risk, like the $150 lung tissue experiment that killed nineteen-year-old Nicole Wan at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester last year. Strong Memorial was also the site of a "Civilian Public Service Unit" during World War 11, according to *Guinea Pig Zero,* an independently-published magazine about life as a human research subject. Government scientists used conscientious objectors for experiments on "high-altitude breathing, low-protein diets, and the endurance of the human body in extreme weather conditions".

Animal drug testing, the mechanism that is supposed to minimize the danger to volunteers of drugs that have never been tested on humans, is unreliable. In the early 1990s, the FDA approved fialuridine for healthy human volunteers after it proved nontoxic to dogs. They have an enzyme that neutralizes the drug. But five Phase II patients died after taking fialuridine, which was developed by Eli Lilly and Oclassen.

Princeton's Clinical Pharmacology Unit rates "a solid A" in an evaluation of six drug-testing sites in the middle Atlantic states, compiled by *Guinea Pig Zero* editor Robert Helms. "We find this unit to be a safe, profitable and friendly place to do our pigging", Helms wrote. At the other end of the spectrum, the Clinical Research Unit that tests drugs for Ciba-Geigy, jointly run by Allegheny-Medical College of Pennsylvania and Hahnemann Hospital, rated an "F" with *Guinea Pig Zero.* The magazine says staff treat the guinea pigs disrespectfully, and are sloppy in their medical procedures.

A Smith-Kline Beecham site got a "D" because of the researchers' lack of concern for guinea pig safety. In December 1995, one friend of Helms participated in an SKB study that mixed the psychiatric drug Paxil with an antihistamine. He came out "with $7000 in his pocket, but with his mind on planet Zork ... Formerly a respected activist with connections all over the world, he's down to two or three cautious friends who patiently listen to his delusional babbling." At the height of his lunacy, he saw the film *Twelve Monkeys* "about nine times," raving that "it was a mystical sign that signaled a new historical era, and which was speaking directly to him". The FDA documented "severe withdrawal syndrome" when drug study participants stopped taking Paxil, including "extreme anxiety, hostility, vision abnormalities, insomnia, dizziness, and diarrhea". Despite these and other horror stories, Paxil was approved for release to the general public.

Most of the human guinea pigs are poor, many are unemployed black men willing to trade unknown risks for fast cash.

Helms told us that "good studies" are increasingly hard to get into because so many people apply. As a result, some pharmaceutical guinea pigs supplement their income by participating in more exotic medical tests. An odd-jobber from Massachusetts who goes by the name of Vermin Supreme recalls a particularly grueling 10-day experiment with the Circadian Sleep Disorder Center at Brigham Women's University. The white-coats tried to keep him awake for 48 hours at a stretch, controlling his exposure to light and feeding him a quarter of a turkey sandwich every hour in order to disrupt his eating cycle. He also has painful memories of being repeatedly probed with a rectal thermometer.

Even Princeton's highly-rated program raises troubling questions about the ethics of drug testing. We first heard about the testing center from a person who formerly worked as a consultant to Bristol-Myers. This person said that when he first started his job he was mystified to see long lines of young black men waiting for a special bus near the university. A cab driver told him that the men were guinea pigs for Bristol-Myers, and that most were unemployed residents of nearby Trenton.

The Princeton site makes participation in experiments especially alluring to the poor. The Pharmacology Unit runs a courtesy van to give people without cars easy access to the facility. There is a bank in easy walking distance and the Unit gives its so-called "volunteers" a letter to guarantee that they won't have problems cashing their checks. Screening participants enjoy a free, all-you-can-eat lunch at the hospital cafeteria. Once admitted to the study, they benefit from free meals, shelter, laundry, a pool table, cable TV and a video library.

On a sunny morning last summer, our investigator set out for the Clinical Pharmacology Unit's clean, modern campus on Herrontown Road. After giving blood, he was instructed to drink a standard dose of Robitussin cough syrup. For the next six hours, he stayed at the CPU to give urine, allowing the experimenters to classify his body's speed at breaking down the medicine. Between trips to the bathroom, he chatted with prospective volunteers who came for screening appointments. Seven of the thirteen were black, two were Latino and one was an immigrant from Croatia.

One man trying to support a family did construction work by day and computer work by night, but said "you always need the money". An unemployed

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resident of Richmond, Virginia, who last worked at a relative's telephone repair company for $9/hour, planned to spend the money on rent. Also strapped for cash were a cab driver and a man who worked packing boxes.

Not all guinea pigs can be seen as helpless victims of drug company predation. One Latino man in his thirties has made his living through drug studies for nearly ten years. Chatting cheerfully in the TV room, where he is finishing up a study of painkillers, he explains that he is "a travelin' man. I can't deal with no 9-to-5". His worst guinea pig experience resulted from "a drug to open your arteries" that made him feel "like my head was gonna split open".

The experimental stroke medicine that most of the prospective vol unteers were screening for, BMS-204352, causes liver cell enlargement and thyroid gland changes in rats. "*The significance of these mild liver and thyroid changes to humans is completely unknown,*" warns the volunteer information paper. In dogs, the drug caused body weight loss, decreased blood count and EKG changes. The dissolving solution in which the drug or placebo is immersed caused "*extensive local irritation and injury to the injection sites*" in dogs, but is nonetheless being used in human volunteers on the grounds that it was safe for the rats.

Two human volunteers who received a 0.0lmg/kg dosage of BMS-204352 reported a "strange" taste and tingling sensation in the back of the head. Now the Unit will administer higher doses to new groups of human volunteers, and, "if safety permits", giving up to 0.2mg/kg, twenty times more than the amount that made a volunteer's head tingle.

The goal of Phase I tests is to determine the toxicity to humans of new drugs by gradually increasing dosages until drug takers start to become sick. Because you are a healthy volunteer, your alternative is not to participate in this study," states the experimental protocol. "*There is no prior human experience with BMS-204352 or its dissolving solution. The actual side effects of BMS-204352 or its dissolving solution in humans are completely unknown.*"

The goal of Phase I drug testing is to gradually keep increasing the dosages until the human guinea pigs get sick.

Testers are willing to run risks because of the promise of fast cash. A Brooklyn resident has participated in drug studies at various sites to supplement his income, the rest of which comes from working odd jobs, including moving work and tennis lessons. A man from Newark was screening for a study that would pay $2,000. If approved for the experiment, he would buy a TV set, "some nice clothes", and some dope.

Rounding out the list of lab rat hopefuls were a Maryland man who had just finished graduate school in education and three friends of college age who lived near Princeton. The future teacher expressed a desire not to be sitting around the house while his wife brought home the bacon. One of the youths, home on summer break, said "my mom would kill me" if she knew he was doing a drug study.

Recreational drug users are supposed to be rigorously excluded from testing programs, but guinea pigs have devised a host of methods to beat the lab's urine tests. In the lunchroom, a youth from Queens, participating in a current study so he would have cash to fix his car, recommended goldenseal root as a means of evading detection. Others attested to the purgative powers of cranberry juice, or warm water with vinegar. One longtime guinea pig counseled mixing tap water with "a little squirt of gold" coloring in the sampling container.

Since he had smoked marijuana several times in the week before the screening (and did not use any tricks to beat the urine test), **CounterPunch**'s man expected to be banned from the Pharmacology Unit's study of BMS-204352. But the following week Dottie, a Unit employee, called to tell him he had passed the screening physical and offer him a place in the stroke medicine study. Since we had agreed that participation in the drug study was something neither **CounterPunch** nor our man wanted to be part of, he declined the offer. ■

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